



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

45 Fort Hill Road
Groton, CT 06340-4394
Town Clerk (860)441-6640
Town Manager
(860)441-6630

Mayor Harry A. Watson, Councilors Peter J. Bartinik, Jr., Natalie Burfoot Billing, Heather Sherman Bond, Catherine Kolnaski, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., Paulann H. Sheets, Thomas J. Skrmetti, and Elissa T. Wright.

Tuesday, October 19, 2004

6:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

SPECIAL MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Watson called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Bartinik, Jr., Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Sheets and Councilor Skrmetti

Members Absent: Councilor Billing, Councilor Bond and Councilor Wright

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Assistant to the Town Manager Lee Vincent and Executive Assistant Nicki Bresnayan.

3. NEW BUSINESS

2003-0177

Renovations & Additions to Groton School Facilities - Phase I

Discussed

- School Architect Selection Review

Town Manager Mark Oefinger explained this is a presentation on the process that was used to select the consultant for the school project. A number of members of the selection committee were present to answer Councilors' questions. The Town Manager distributed a copy of a presentation that was then made by Rick Norris of the Permanent School Building Committee (PSBC). The PSBC reviewed the Request for Qualifications (RFQ) prior to advertising in early July. Numerous questions were posed to staff by potential consultants and ultimately 23 firms responded to the RFQ. The packages were reviewed by staff and short-listed to eight firms to be interviewed. A selection panel conducted interviews over three days. Mr. Norris noted that the process moved along expeditiously, and he suggested the Council should be heartened that the Town Manager and Superintendent of Schools took the time to sit in on the interviews. The eight firms were rated based on weighted criteria to come up with total points; three firms emerged from that process. Next the panel sent questions to the three firms and conducted second interviews.

Councilor Wright arrived at 6:10 p.m.

Roll Call: Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Bartinik, Jr., Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Sheets, Councilor Skrmetti and Councilor Wright

Members Absent: Councilor Billing and Councilor Bond

Discussed

Mr. Norris noted that all three firms gave great presentations, but two ranked higher and were nearly equal. Further discussions took place and the panel voted on the remaining two firms, ultimately choosing Jeter, Cook & Jepson over Fletcher-Thompson. Mr. Norris noted that the panel considered performance and timing issues, previous experience and examples of previous work.

The panel's recommendation was brought to the PSBC, which chose to unanimously accept the recommendation and negotiations were started. The PSBC will be meeting on Thursday to review

scope of work and fees. Mr. Norris noted that a schedule was developed in July and it was anticipated that negotiations would be completed by the end of November so the project is on track.

Councilor Sheets thanked the committee for their work and for explaining the process for the public. She asked about the Committee's tour of Stonington High School. John Webster, also a member of the PSBC, visited Stonington High School and stated the project is not dissimilar to the Fitch plan. Stonington is utilizing a portion of the existing school, expanding some areas, and eliminating older portions of the structure. It is phased construction similar to what will be required at Fitch. Kaestle-Boos was the architect for Stonington. The Superintendent of Schools in Stonington was enthusiastic about the project. Mr. Norris noted that Fletcher-Thompson had also done projects while a school remained in session so there are plenty of examples from which to gain insight.

Councilor Billing arrived at 6:21 p.m.

Roll Call: Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Bartinik, Jr., Councilor Billing, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Sheets, Councilor Skrmetti and Councilor Wright
Members Absent: Councilor Bond

Discussed

Councilor Sheets asked if references from previous clients were reviewed. Mr. Norris explained that background checking was done through the panel's contacts in other school systems. All of the firms had good reputations. Councilor Sheets asked if there was a history of legal or arbitration disputes. Mr. Norris indicated he did not know of any disputes associated with the top three firms, but how those issues will be handled will be incorporated into the negotiated agreement.

Councilor O'Beirne noted the alternatives for packaging the project. He asked if multiple packages were considered and how a single package with one firm was chosen. Mr. Norris explained that the firms that responded to the RFQ were specific about what they were bidding on. For example, one firm bid on only one elementary school. Since the two elementary schools are basically the same, it was logical to package them. Only one firm wanted to do just the high school. All other firms wanted to do all three schools. The panel felt that a single firm would help maintain control of the projects. Councilor O'Beirne suggested that the elementary school package and high school are very different projects. Mr. Norris noted that the RFP gave consultants the option to respond to one, two or all three schools. During the interview process, the panel made sure that a single firm could handle the high school separately from the elementary schools, and all three of the top firms proposed two separate project management teams.

Councilor O'Beirne expressed support for competition. Mr. Norris stated there is no need to select different firms just to create competition. If there had been a good reason to choose two firms, the panel would have done so. The PSBC's job is to get the school project done within the budget and on time, and it was felt that a single firm would best accomplish that. Mr. Webster added that it makes financial sense to use a single architectural firm from a presentation standpoint. Future phases will provide an opportunity to use different firms.

Councilor Sheets asked if there were discussions during the interview process of fees reflecting the economy of doing all of the projects at one time with one firm. Mr. Norris explained that fees are discussed during the negotiation phase. The interviews were designed to find the most qualified candidates. He added that the top firms all had histories of coming in at or under budget.

Councilor O'Beirne questioned Mr. Norris' statement that the architect will be included in selection of the Construction Manager. Director of Public Works Gary Schneider explained that the architect will act as advisor and assist in writing the Request for Proposals. The architect will

help identify what the Town should be looking for in a Construction Manager. Town staff and the PSBC will make the actual selection. It was determined that it would be better to utilize the chosen firm in this matter rather than hiring another consultant.

Councilor O'Beirne asked if Stonington used a Construction Manager. Mr. Schneider stated that Stonington used a Construction Manager at Risk. The Town will utilize a Construction Manager as Agent where there is a set fee for the Construction Manager, but the Town will tell that person what materials to use, what substitutions to make, etc. Mr. Schneider noted that the Construction Manager is different from the Project Manager staff position.

Mr. Norris noted that the PSBC is working on construction standards for the schools to challenge the architects to see what they can come up with for costs, materials, etc. Also, a number of committee members attended a high performance school seminar and got numerous ideas on materials, money saving tips, etc.

Councilor Skrmetti noted the Guide to Town Government states that one of the tasks of the PSBC is to certify to the Town Council that the plans meet the criteria the Council has agreed to. Mr. Norris suggested that wording is misleading. The PSBC actually must certify that plans meet the educational specifications developed by the Board of Education. Councilor Skrmetti asked staff to develop a list for the Town Council outlining the criteria that must be met by the plans.

Councilor O'Beirne asked if the project will be designed for maximum reimbursement or designed for the minimum Town cost required to meet specifications. Mr. Norris stated that obviously the PSBC will look to minimize Town costs, while at the same time making sure that any work is done in such a way as to maximize reimbursement. All members of the PSBC are sensitive to funding issues.

Councilor Sheets asked about the construction schedule. Mr. Norris indicated that 2007 is the anticipated completion date for the two elementary schools. The completion date for the high school depends on the approach used. Specific schedules will not be developed until the architect is on board.

Mayor Watson asked about the need to start construction of Eastern Point to retain existing funding. Wes Greenleaf, Superintendent of Buildings and Grounds, explained that modified legislation was written to allow construction to start by June 2006.

Councilor Bartinik asked if the selection committee meetings were open to the public or conducted in executive session. Town Manager Oefinger stated the panel was a working selection committee. The interviews were not formal meetings of the PSBC or any other Town group, therefore they were not advertised.

Councilor Billing asked about the opportunities for staff and citizens to have input into the final designs. Mr. Norris noted that the PSBC has a citizen comment period at the beginning of their meetings; no comments have been received to date. As the process proceeds and the PSBC gets into design issues and educational specifications, there will be input from various sources to assure that the buildings meet the needs of end users, as well as public meetings.

Mr. Norris reiterated that the PSBC is currently looking at school construction standards.

Councilor Billing stated she was satisfied with the process and the results were exactly what she expected. She was not surprised that a single firm was chosen for the entire project.

Councilor Sheets asked if the firms had any experience in remediating contaminated sites. Mr. Norris stated the top three firms all had environmental consultants on their staffs with the

capability to address those issues.

Councilor O'Beirne asked if the Council and RTM will have to approve the formal contract with the architect. The Town Manager stated no, that per the Charter, the ultimate decision lies with the Director of Public Works. Control of the project has been turned over to the PSBC, which will sign off on change orders and make sure the project is in compliance. Even though this is a large project, it is no different from other CIP projects in terms of the process. Examples of similar, smaller projects cited during the discussion were Pleasant Valley Road South Reconstruction and the Water Pollution Control Facility Upgrades. Councilor O'Beirne explained that the referendum set the upper limit on the three projects. He stated that when the project construction is complete, and the bonds are sold on the market, different documentation will be required and the Council will sign off on it then.

Councilor Wright noted that when the PSBC was appointed the building committee for this project, the Town Manager was also authorized to execute all contracts. Town Manager Oefinger doesn't believe that this funding comes back to the Council even when the bonds are issued, but he will check the requirements.

Councilor Sheets asked for an explanation of how the project is ultimately paid for. Town Manager Oefinger compared it to getting a construction loan to build a home and then getting permanent financing. Temporary notes are issued during construction, and at some point, usually as a school is completed, permanent funding in the form of bonds is solicited for the actual dollar amount of the Town's obligation (cost minus the state's contribution).

Councilor Skrmetti asked for a referral to the Committee of the Whole on the PSBC's information on what they are going to certify to.

4. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Skrmetti, to adjourn at 7:06 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.